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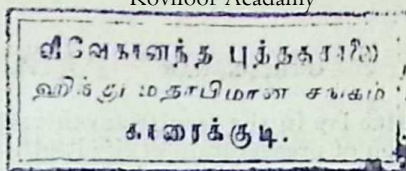
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GURU NANAK

On the borders of the modern districts of Montgomery and Gujranwala and at a distance of about fifteen leagues south-west of Lahore, stands the little old town of Talwandi, the birth place of Baba Nanak. A Hindu king is said to have originally built it, but the Mussalman invaders of those mediaeval times subjected it to pillage and plunder, and it remained in ruins until it was re-built by a Mussalman chief, Rai Bular, concerning whom a few words are necessary here, since they throw light on the social and political condition of the country at the time when Nanak was born and brought up, and carried his mission to the world and founded the sect of 'Sikhs' (Sishyas, disciples) who were destined to become Singhs (Sinhas, lions) in the course of the next century and a half.

When Taimur left India, after spreading anarchy and devastation over a considerable part of Northern India, there came to rule in Delhi a dynasty of Sayyids, the last of whom, Alal-ul-din, dissatisfied with the smallness of his domain, repaired to distant Badaon to pass the rest of his days in peace, and left Delhi and the empire's fortunes to Bahlol Khan Lodi whose ancestors had made immense fortunes by trade. On the accession of Bahlol Khan to the throne (1450—1488), his kinsman, Daulat Khan, became the Governor of the Punjab with Sultanpur as his capital; but the province seems to have been distributed among many Mussalman chiefs who functioned as the retainers of the sovereigns at Delhi. One of them was Rai Bhoi, the Proprietor or Zemindar of Talwandi and, on his death, his estate was inherited by his son, Rai Bular who, like his father was a converted Hindu, a Mussalman-Rajput, and he re-built the town perhaps out of sympathy for the suffering people to whose religion until lately he himself belonged. He was perhaps one of those recruits to Islam that had been secured through "a hasty circumcision and an enforced utterance of Arabic words," whose meaning was beyond his comprehension,

but whose chief value lay in the secular advantages of conversion, or in the boon of preservation of life itself. Rai Bular lived with his family in a fort built on the summit of a mound, while the villagers lived in the plain. Talwandi was, as it is even now, surrounded by a wide expanse strewn with gardens of bowers and trees and thickets wearing a cheerful appearance throughout the seasons of the year, except when the winds of the sandy desert are not furious—thus making it a fine retreat, free from the excitements of the outer political world, for those who desired to pass their time in meditation.

Birth and Childhood

Here Nanak was born in 1469 A. D. His father, Kalu, was the village accountant, a Khatri by caste, with a modest means of livelihood. Tripta, his wife, bore him a son and a daughter, Nanak and Nanaki. The astrologer, when informed of the birth of Kalu's son, is said to have adored the child with folded hands, and predicted that Nanak would wear on his person the symbols of dignity appropriate for princes and prophets. When Nanak was five years, say the Sikh chroniclers, he had great attraction for spiritual matters, and manifested a rare capacity to understand and discourse upon divine subjects. Rai Bular, the Zemindar himself, had a mysterious attraction for the young boy and in later years when the Guru's name spread far and wide he, in loving remembrance of Nanak's childhood, had a tank constructed on the spot where the child used to play and it was later enlarged by a high official, a Mussalman admirer of the Guru. The tank is called Balakrida or the child's playground. Every spot associated with Nanak's younger days has become sacred, and Talwandi itself is now known as Nankana Sahib.

At the age of seven he was admitted to the school. The master, as usual, wrote the alphabets of the language for the boy, and was astounded the next day when Nanak not merely copied the letters from memory, but took them successively for metrical expression of his Godward ideas and aspirations. Thus he composed 35 stanzas for the 35 letters and each of them began with a word whose initial letter was in the alphabetical order. Here is the first stanza:

"The one Lord who created the world is the Lord
of all

Fortunate is their advent into the world, whose hearts
remain attached to God's service ;

O foolish man, why hast thou forgotten Him ?

When thou adjustest thine account, my friend, thou
shalt be deemed educated."

And the closing verse of this acrostic is :—

"What God who made the world hath to do, He con-
tinueth to do ;

He acteth and causeth others to act ; He knoweth
everything ; thus sayeth the poet Nanak."

Challenges the Teacher

Nanak attended the school until one day he was observed to remain silent without applying himself to his studies. When the teacher asked him to explain himself, the boy challenged his very competency to teach him. "Sir, to all your learning, the vedas and shastras," Nanak said, "I prefer Divine knowledge" and composed the hymn that begins with "Burn worldly love." The schoolmaster was spell-bound and paid homage to the saintly youngster.

On leaving the school, Nanak devoted himself to private study and meditation. He frequently retired into the forest, freely moved in the company of yogis and spiritual thinkers and devotees and thus got the cream of religious culture, the fruit of higher learning which he could not have obtained from the humble village school had he remained there longer.

From now, the name of the formless Creator became the object of his worship and meditation, and the *Sat Nam* or True Name is indeed a special feature of his creed. "The body which is not filled with the True Name is of no account" says Nanak.

All this education did not, however, satisfy Kalu who felt that it could not advance his worldly position, and so got Nanak to study Persian, the language of the Rulers. But soon the Persian, like the Hindu teacher before him, was astonished at his marvellous compositions—the acrostic on the letters of

the Persian alphabet. Nanak easily became a fair Persian scholar. But Kalu was not yet satisfied. He even feared that his son was becoming insane and so asked him to herd the buffaloes in the forest. One day he fell asleep and a neighbour's field was trespassed by the cattle in his charge. When the owner complained, Nanak said that God would bless the field. The aggrieved owner took the matter before Rai Bular who called for Kalu to settle the quarrel. But on Nanak stating that the field was really blessed by God and that no injury befell the field, the Zemindar sent his own messengers to inspect the field and to their astonishment they saw not a single blade eaten or trampled upon and conveyed this report! The field which was the scene of this miracle is now known as Kiara Sahib.

Efforts at "Reformation"

Kalu next made arrangements for the *Upanayan* of his son. When the Brahmin priest, after performing the preliminary ceremony, took the sacred thread to put on Nanak's neck, the boy snatched it away, questioned its value and disposed of the priest after sermonising upon true *Upanayan* in his usual way.

What is to be done with such a boy? To Kalu, he was becoming a problem and this time he thought of a new corrective. Soon after his daughter Nanaki's marriage to Jai Ram, an amil employed to collect land revenue, he arranged for the marriage of Nanak with Sulakhani though he was only 14 years old and again entrusted him with herding the cattle. It was on this occasion that Rai Bular saw him while on his duty asleep but watched over by a cobra. Though the ruler was thus impressed by the strange powers of the boy, Kalu was not. On the other hand, he became more and more pessimistic about the worldly reformation of his son. He tried to make him a husbandman. But the boy said: "The body is the field, good works the seeds, heart the cultivator... God's Name irrigates." To another question Nanak answered: "I have sown my field and the harvest is ready. All relations, friends, beggars and the poor will be benefitted". Then the fond father tried another artifice. He gave the boy money and a horse and a servant to go to Gujranwala to

purchase articles of trade and become a tradesman. But on the way in spite of the servant's protestations he spent the money in clothing a sect of holy men. Cattle-grazing, tillage, trade, none of these succeeded. When all hopes were given up, his mother pleaded that for the sake of family prestige they must put up the show that Nanak had some occupation. But he would do nothing; he sat silent, lay down, ate nothing, drank nothing. Some were certain, but all suspected that Nanak was mad: there was something serious. The physician was called for consultation. To a question from him, Nanak broke silence, laughed and said in this vein: "The body is weeping, the soul crieth, physician, give none of thy medicines. I first feel the pain of separation from God, then a pang of hunger for contemplation on Him....." The physician withdrew, but not before paying homage to the great patient.

As a State Servant

At last Jai Ram, Nanak's brother-in-law, after consultation with Rai Bular, offered to take Nanak, the youth with him to Sultanpur, where he could find him appointment under Daulat Khan's Government. Nanak agreed. While all were glad at his departure, his wife was an exception. She remonstrated: "My life, even here thou hast not loved me. When thou goest to a foreign country, how shalt thou return?"

"Simple woman, what have I been doing here?"

"When thou satest down at home," she again entreated him, "I possessed in my estimation the sovereignty of the whole earth; now this world is of no avail to me."

He became compassionate. "Be not anxious," he said, "thy sovereignty shall ever abide."

"My life, I will not remain behind, take me with thee."

"I am now going away; if I can earn my living, I will send for thee. Obey my order."

Very little is known of Nanak's married life beyond the fact that he begot two sons Shrichand and Lakshmidas.

When Nanak went to take Rai Bular's permission to leave for Sultanpur, the latter gave a farewell dinner and requested him to give him any order, *i.e.*, to state what favour he might grant him. Nanak's characteristic reply was :

"I give thee one order if thou wilt comply with it. When thine own might availeth not, clasp thy hands and worship God."

At Sultanpur, introduced by his brother-in-law as an educated man to Daulat Khan, the Governor, Nanak received a dress of honour and the post of a storekeeper. He applied himself to his duties so well that he was congratulated by everybody. He used a very small portion of the provisions allowed to him to maintain himself, the rest he disposed of to the poor. In weighing out the provisions, when he came to number thirteen (Tera), he repeated it many times, as it also means "Thine"—*i.e.*, "I am thine, O Lord." He would spend the nights in singing hymns to the creator. Then he would go to the neighbouring river for bath and return as day dawned to discharge his official duties. Mardana, a hereditary minstrel from Talwandi joined him now. Many other friends came; Nanak introduced them all to the Khan and got them a living. They all sat together at dinner, sang together during nights; and Mardana accompanied him on the rabob or rebeek, a musical instrument of Arabian origin which was then in use in Northern India.

The Great Vision

One morning as Nanak did not return after his bath it was thought he was drowned. But he had been to a forest where, in vision, he was in God's presence for three days. What actually transpired is necessarily a Divine secret. But it is certain that it was on this great occasion that Nanak had his first radical Divine realisation which formed the basis and authority of his mission. In the blunt language of our human mind, God said to Nanak: "I am with thee..... Go and repeat My name and cause others to do likewise. Abide uncontaminated by the world. Practise charity, worship, meditation. I have given thee this cup of nectar, a pledge of my regard."

Nanak sang many verses in gratitude. On this a voice was heard : " O Nanak, Thou hast seen my sovereignty.....I am the primal Brahm, thou art the divine Guru." It was here that he uttered the preamble for Japji or Divine service which every Sikh is expected to get by heart and sing every day.

When Nanak returned to Sultanpur, he gave his belongings to the poor, donned a religious costume, remained silent a day and then uttered this pregnant sentence : " There is no Hindu and no Mussalman." The Qazi complained and Guru Nanak was summoned to see the Governor. When he appeared, the Governor addressed him : "Nanak, it is my misfortune that an officer of your calibre should become a Fakir." Then, seating him by his side, he requested the Guru to explain his statement in the presence of the Qazi. He confined himself to the latter part of it since no Hindu was present there to dispute his utterance. He discoursed upon the true ideals of the Shariat, the deeper elements in the teachings of the Prophet and answered convincingly all the questions of the Qazi who was astonished at the lecture. The time for afternoon prayer came, and all including Nanak went to the mosque. As the Qazi began his service, he observed the Guru laughing in his face and so again complained to the Nawab of his conduct. The Guru said that the Qazi's prayer was unacceptable to God and gave the reason that while the Qazi was ostensibly performing Divine service, his mind was filled with the fear that his babe might fall into the well in the enclosure. The Nawab was also told that behind his own pretensions of prayer, there was the thought of purchasing horses in Kabul. Both the Nawab and the Qazi admitted the truth. All the Mussalmans present were amazed. Many questions were put to him and were answered. Nanak next addressed a sublime hymn. Doulat Khan fell at his feet and in loving admiration offered his estate, and his authority which were of course declined. Both Hindus and Mussalmans came to pay their respects and take leave of the Guru when they came to know that he was leaving on his God-appointed mission.

There were complaints of his extravagance as storekeeper but on investigation the stores were found to be full, the accounts correct and money due to the Guru himself from the

State. He requested the Nawab to spend that money in giving relief to the poor.

Starts on the Mission

After a short stay with the Sadhus and Fakirs, with whom he had been lately in close touch, accompanied by his minstrel Mardana he embarked on his life-work.

He first proceeded to Sayyidpur, stayed with Mardana in the house of Lalu, a carpenter for two days and prolonged his stay at his request. He cared not to observe the caste rules and dined not within the sacred lines. When questioned he said: "The whole earth is my sacred lines and he is pure who loves truth." Thence he and Mardana proceeded to many villages in the Punjab.

Once when Mardana, at the Guru's bidding, went to a village for food, he returned with large offerings of presents. The Guru asked him to throw them away and explained the disastrous effects of offerings on laymen. "These are poison hard to digest." He once accepted the false hospitality of Sheik Sajjan, a notorious robber, who used to consign his guests into a well to perish. When after dinner, the Guru sang a hymn with the robber's permission, it went home to him and so changed his heart that he fell at the Guru's feet, confessed and received the God's name.

At Kurukshetra, Nanak attended a religious fair. He cooked a deer for food which was indeed a horror to the Brahmins who called him a heretic. He brought home to the Pandits and the people there how they have forgotten the essentials, the noble ideals of the forefathers and confined themselves to the externals. He was unsparing in his treatment of superstition and outspoken in his condemnation of hypocrisy.

He said: "The Hindus are going to hell. Death will seize and mercilessly punish them." A Brahmin in his Pharisaical pride challenged him. The Guru retorted: "Yes, you do jap, repeat God's name. It is true that if you do it with true love, you will not be damned. But your hands take the rosaries and count the beads. Your minds are bound to worldly objects. One is thinking of trade in

Multan, another of his gain in Kabul. Is this not sham, rank hypocrisy ? Can you deceive God ?”

A Miracle at Court

At Hardwar the Brahmins, impressed by his hymns and his true greatness, pressed the Guru in vain to return to his allegiance to the Hindu religion. At Panipat he had a long discussion with a Sheikh, a priest of a shrine, who in the end shook hands with the Guru, kissed his feet and said to those around: “He bears witness to God. To behold him is sufficient.”

The Guru was not a miracle-monger, an itinerant showman. On arriving at Delhi, he heard that an elephant of the ruler Ibrahim Lodi had died. He said to the keepers: “No, it is not dead, go and rub the forehead of the animal with your hands and say ‘Wah Guru,’” (i.e., hail to the Guru.) They did accordingly; the animal rose up. The Emperor was astonished and asked the Guru if he could do the miracle again if the animal died. Nanak replied: “God is the sole destroyer or re-animator. Prayers are for Faqirs.”

The animal then actually died. When the Emperor commanded the Guru to restore it to life, he said: “Red hot iron cannot be held for a moment in the hand. Faqirs become red in the heat of God’s love and cannot be constrained.” Though thus rebuffed, the Emperor was pleased.

The Guru then set out towards the east, visited the temple of Gorakh, met the Siddhas who were pleased with his inspired utterances and hymns. At Benares, the chief Pandit, Chatur Das had a long discussion with the Guru and at its close, fell at his feet, became a Sikh and possessor of God’s name. At Kamarup (Assam), Nur-Shah, the queen, tempted him, but was at last taught true wisdom and means of salvation. On leaving Kamarup, he is said to have met Kali-purusha (the personification of the iron age) and to have been tempted by him. To Mardana he explained who Kali was. “When true men speak the truth and suffer for it; when penitents fail to do penance in their homes; when he who repeateth God’s name meeteth obloquy—these are the signs of Kaliyug.”

He then made a coastal voyage on the Bay of Bengal, to Puri and returned to the Punjab, visiting on the way the shrine of Sheik Farid, a great Muslim saint. Sheik Brahm, (Ibrahim) its pious chief had long discussions with the Guru.

As Babar's Captive

Thus after 12 years of wandering, at Mardana's request, he turned towards Talwandi. The Guru stayed at a few miles' distance sending the minstrel ahead. Kalu and Tripta came and wept and remonstrated with the Guru and implored him to return. There was a long scene and the Guru closed it, saying : "Mother, agree to what I say : consolation shall come to thee."

Nanak resumed his wanderings, again visited the pious Sheik Brahm and again saw Lalu at Sayyidpur who complained of the Pathan oppression. The Guru said : "The Pathan rule is ending ; Babar is coming."

So it happened. And when Babar captured the city, there was a general massacre of people, Pathans and Hindus ; but the lives of the Guru and Mardana were spared since they were strangers. They were, however, ordered to be taken as slaves. The Guru was condemned to carry loads on his head. One day Babar heard that the load on his head was one cubit over his head without support. Immediately he sent for the Guru and when he heard his inspired hymns the Emperor grew penitent. It is said Babar fell at the Guru's feet and offered him presents. The Guru only wanted the release of the captives. To a prayer of Babar, the Guru said that he could not embrace Islam or any other faith and to the Emperor's request for the Guru's blessing, he said : "Thine empire shall remain for a time"....and to his request for instruction the Guru said, "deliver just judgments, reverence holy men, forswear wine and gambling. The monarch who indulges in these vices shall, if he survives, bewail his misdeeds. Be merciful to the vanquished and worship God in spirit and in truth."

Boon of Long Life

The Guru then proceeded to Sialkot and visited many places in the Punjab. By this time he was universally held to be a man of God. Every verse he composed was published

abroad. He next went in a north-western direction and stayed on the banks of the Ravi. A millionaire official who was at first sceptical, became a devout disciple, built a Sikh temple and founded a village on the Ravi named Kartarpur and he dedicated both to the Guru and thereafter Kartarpur became the Guru's fixed abode. He took off his extraordinary costume and adopted a more conventional dress. Here his parents and relatives came and were admitted since the Guru's creed is not to shun, but to live in the world, not world-minded but God-minded. Here he initiated the practice of singing hymns at the close of the night.

Once he questioned a boy of seven why he attended regularly the prayer. The boy said that one day at his mother's bidding he lit the fire and put on the wood and observed that little sticks burnt first and then the bigger ones. Hence afraid of early death, he attended the religious gatherings. The Guru was pleased and called him Budha (wise) and he came to be known as Bhai Budha. He was held in such high esteem that he was commissioned to confer the tilak (patch of Guruship) on the first five successors of Guru Nanak and he lived for 107 years!

The Guru then proceeded on a tour to the south, the Dravidian country and on return went to Kashmir. Ceylon was his next objective and there king Shivanabha paid homage to him. Success upon success greeted him everywhere on his return journey to the north. The most eminent of Kashmir Pandits, Brahma Das was convinced of his greatness and fell at his feet. Thence Nanak climbed up the Himalayas where he took rest for a while in the company of Siddhas, who were pleased with his holy mission.

Sojourn to Mecca

Nanak next turned his steps to Mecca. Both the journey and his stay there are associated with remarkable incidents. On the way he met a Fakir who became frightened on seeing a cloud accompanying him overhead, and interpreting it as the outcome of a Hindu's resolve to visit Mecca, asked the Guru to go before or after him.

"Then go ahead," said Nanak and when the Fakir turned round, he could see neither the Guru nor the cloud.

The Fakir began to wring his hands and said: "It was God who was with me, but I could not endure the sight of Him."

On reaching Mecca, his disregard of Moslem customs immediately attracted attention. When he lay down for sleep, with his feet turned towards the Kaaba, an Arab priest kicked the "infidel sinner." The Guru's reply was: "Then turn my feet in the direction in which God is not." The priest dragged him to another side and was bewildered to find the temple turn round following the evolution of Nanak's body. Those who witnessed the miracle saluted him as a supernatural being.

On his return, Lahina, a priest of a sect of Durga worshippers was convinced of the Guru's greatness and became his disciple. He chose to do menial service to the Guru. It is said that on one occasion when the Guru, at the instance of a Yogi, proposed to test the steadfast loyalty of the Sikhs, every one failed, he alone triumphed and the Guru taught him how to utter the True Name with a pure heart and said that by constant practice, God's light would dawn in his heart. The Yogi who was present then said: "Nanak, he who is produced from thy body—anga—shall be the Guru." Upon this, the Guru embraced Lahina and calling him Angad decreed that he shall be his successor.

The Last Days

Nanak's last days were spent at Kartarpur and when in 1538, at the age of 70, the Guru knew his end was approaching, he appointed Angad as his successor. When this information spread, Sikhs, Hindus and Moslems came to bid farewell. There were some Sikhs who had seceded from the Guru. Angad begged of him to pardon them. "I have forgiven them all for thy sake," said the Guru.

To his sons who had also rebelled, he said: "My sons, God giveth to his creatures. You shall have food and clothing in abundance, and if you repeat God's name, you shall be saved at last."

When he heard of the dissension between his Hindu and Moslem followers regarding the disposal of his body after death, he decided: "Let the Hindus place flowers on my right, and the Moslems on my left. They, whose flowers are found fresh in the morning may dispose of the body." When

the solemn moment came, the last sloka of the Japgi was sung. The Guru drew a sheet over him, uttered 'Wah Guru', made obeisance to God and blended his light with Guru Angad's. Next morning when the sheet was removed it is said that nothing was to be seen—a supreme miracle! The flowers on both the sides were in full bloom.

The Sikhs erected a shrine and the Moslems a tomb on the Ravi; but both were later washed away.

After the Guru passed away, his successor, Guru Angad collected his compositions and reduced them to writing in the Gurumukhi characters which he invented, and they are called the Adigranth occupying the first ward (Mohalla) of the "Granth Sahib," the sacred book of the Sikhs.

Nanak's Life-work

The Guru had in his travels as well as at Kartarpur often fallen into devotional trance, and sang under the compelling necessity of Divine inspiration several hymns to the Divine Father; and these spontaneous compositions of poetry make references in reverence and admiration to Kabir, Nam Dev, Jaidev, Tribekan and many other devotee-saints that went before him. But unlike them, he taught by example and precept that the world must be faced and not renounced as nothing. He adopted the age-old Hindu theory of re-incarnation and preached that the goal of the human soul's journey was 'Nirvan', i.e., the individual consciousness merging into the Absolute or one God and taught that the main means of attaining Nirvan or Sachkhand (the land of the Real)—according to some Sikhs both are identical, according to others, not—is the singing of Sat Nam or True Name, that the grace of the Guru was absolutely essential to possess the true name, that true Guru was God Himself, and that since God's light dawned in his heart Nanak was the divine Guru.

Whether Guru Nanak was King Janaka* or not according to the Sikhs, the fact remains that his Divine communion and

*It will be interesting to note what Sri' Ramakrishna Paramahansa said referring to the ten Gurus of the Sikhs. "They are all incarnations of the saintly King Janaka. I have heard it said by the Sikhs that just before attaining liberation he was possessed with the idea of doing good to the world. So he was born successively as the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, and after founding the Sikh religion was united for ever with the Supreme Brahman. There is no reason to disbelieve this."

personal spiritual experiences were the basis of his positive teachings and they were the mainspring of all his activities in propagating his faith. But he had to contend against both Hindus and Mussalmans. While his heart bled at the sight of the oppression by the Mahomedan rulers, he became almost desperate when he saw around him everywhere the unspeakable ignorance in which were steeped the classes as well as the masses of Hindus. For, while the Brahmins—themselves fallen and ritual-ridden—lived upon the credulity of the other castes, the Rajputs prided upon their privilege to marry their daughters to the Moslem ruling classes; the masses were content with their caste usages and crude worship; while the few truly religious retired to the forests convinced of the unreality or ephemerality of the world. The Guru saw that the inelastic caste-divisions had no relation whatever to the economic or spiritual needs of the people and attacked it as the main cause of the social, religious and political degradation in the country; and in inducing a larger spiritual vision of the Godhead, he deprecated idolatry and all lower forms of worship.

But India is an impossible country; the continental magnitude of the land is perhaps an excuse; and the Guru in his attempt to bring the divergent peoples under a single spiritual banner was indeed many centuries ahead of the times.

And he bewails:—

This age is a knife, kings are butchers, justice hath
taken wings and fled

In this completely dark night of falsehood the moon of
truth is never seen to rise

I have become perplexed in my search;

In the darkness I find no way.

Devoted to pride, I weep in sorrow;

How shall deliverance be obtained?

Yet the Guru stopped not. He provided the steel which was forged into the holy sword, the Khalsa, that astonishingly novel creation of Guru Govind as will be seen in the next pamphlet.

K. S.